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ABSTRACT

A study examined the volume and quality of distance training in Italy, the bodies most directly interested, and problems and trends. Two factors were singled out that not only led to greater interest in distance training between 1970 and 1980 but also to the first experiments being carried out--the economic crisis and the modernization process. The growth in demand for instruction and training from increasingly broad and new sectors of the population found the public sector incapable of responding appropriately in quantitative terms. Techniques used in the various experiments ranged from the use of very traditional methods (written materials) to others that seemed to anticipate the future (videodisks), from multimedia integration to the use of one aid alone, from measures that use only distance training to others that insert it in a broader context, together with course activities, mixing techniques from different systems. The provision of distance training seemed dominated by a concern to improve professional qualifications in both the public (teacher, vocational training trainers, civil servants) and private sectors. In the future, technological literacy is likely to be the object of most training. Among the anticipated innovations of distance training is the increased importance of the tutor and the fact that distance training experiments can be carried out at the same time as other study or work. (YLB)

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European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

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(summary report)

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PREFACE

Distance learning is a relatively new field of work for CEDEFOP; our interest in this "field" is clear, however, from this study.

Some considerations underlie our interest:

The demand for training and vocational training is growing everywhere: this may be attributed only in part to a more widespread demand for on-going refresher training to meet continuous changes in production methods and machinery.

In addition to the growth in the volume of the training demand, new notions of quality are also playing a part; people are now more determined to choose training paths, methods, resources and contents which are better matched to the way in which they see their lives, their learning speeds and the time they have available for learning.

This training demand is also closely linked to the new and more complex social need to give a more central position to certain areas which are an integral part of daily life, such as time for individual cultural development, leisure time, etc.

Continuing training currently available has little connection with the quality of the demand and is also

somewhat limited in terms of quantity. It is estimated that the training available covers no more than one-third of potential demand (which contradicts principles of social justice as well as the need for collective growth in terms of educational levels and technological culture).

Increasing the quality and quantity of the 'continuing training' offered depends to a large extent on the availability and mobilisation of massive financial resources, making it increasingly necessary to find ways of extending the range of training offered while keeping costs down.

"Distance learning" would appear to provide an answer, not simply because it is a new development, but because its novelty allows it to be used in new ways for new purposes.

Although "traditional" correspondence courses historically provided the springboard for current distance learning ventures, they also led to deep-seated mistrust of this method of "training". The various ways in which different cultural areas see vocational training is a corollary to this. In German-speaking areas, work is "Beruf" (calling) and vocational training (Berufsbildung) provides a way of preparing for this calling which has a moral and social significance. The English term "vocational training", which also emphasises the notion of "vocatio" or calling, is close

to this, whereas this notion is foreign to Latin (or rather, catholic, in Weber's words) countries. The term "formare", borrowed in all probability from the plastic arts, has the sense of shaping individuals to conform to objectives and the set of values which society passes on through its schools.

No other institution has the hallmark of the society which creates it to a greater extent than schools. Schools are therefore seats of power. This explains the "mistrust" with which distance learning has always been viewed. Distance learning, in effect:

- moves training away, in geographical terms as well, from the place where it would "normally" take place, i.e. "at school",
- tends to replace a single public authority by a large number of agencies which are not always easy to identify or even control.

Problems of supervising the content of training dispensed by distance learning schemes and of validating results and recognising diplomas, are also created.

Although there is good reason to believe in the gradual improvement of the quality and range of distance learning available, the reservations and fears mentioned above will have to be overcome.

The aim of this study is to find out whether an overall "system", capable of co-existing with, and supporting,

other vocational training schemes for adults, can be discerned in the many schemes currently operating in Italy. A further aim was to find out whether and to what extent general trends towards change, on one hand, and the new technologies, on the other, were providing any incentive for an overall renewal of distance learning in Italy. The intention was to find out whether Italy was recovering lost ground as regards the more progressive and consolidated attitudes to distance learning in Northern European countries.

CEDEFOP, taking its proper stance, aims to find out whether and under what conditions fruitful cooperation between those responsible for and those who run distance learning schemes is possible within the EEC.

We hope that this report, drafted clearly and competently by Luciano Osbat, will be read by experts, those responsible for vocational training schemes, and those who run these schemes, and that this contribution to "knowledge" will provide an incentive for "action".

Duccio Guerra

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1. THE OBJECTIVES AND METHODS OF RESEARCH ON DISTANCE LEARNING IN ITALY

Distance learning in Italy is a system for teaching and learning which as yet affects only a limited number of people, but the many experiments being carried out and the way some initial ventures are being consolidated clearly show that it is expanding rapidly. After starting as a correspondence school at the beginning of the century, distance learning saw the first experiments conducted in the period 1960-1970: radio and television were used for literacy programmes, while the next decade saw the beginnings of the first experiments in training activities aimed at a working audience and directed towards basic pre-vocational training or vocational refresher or qualification courses. Between 1980 and 1984 distance training had by now taken on a specific shape, differing increasingly from traditional teaching thanks to the use of more closely directed instructional techniques and through the use of specific tools (specially prepared material, audio-visual aids and software): it was in these years that the most important public educational institutions, big firms and organizations operating in the vocational training sector began first to look into it and then try it out.

Awareness of the considerable interest in distance training in Italy over the last fifteen years prompted an enquiry to find out what the volume and quality of

distance training in that country was, which bodies were most directly interested and which problems and trends could be identified in the very near future. When completed the research made it possible to define the types of distance training offered which proposed measures for broad sectors of the working population, aimed at creating new qualifications and updating existing ones, promoted both by public bodies (the State, public authorities and the Regions) and by private bodies (firms and training agencies).

After the introductory stage, given over entirely to assembling and studying the bibliography available in Italy most directly concerned with distance training experiments already conducted or being carried out, interviews were held with experts in the sector, followed by others with key figures and then with those in charge of distance training measures. The initial study, and meetings with distance training experts and scholars, enabled us to single out the experiments considered most significant, viz. those already known to a wide public and which, by virtue of their objectives and the way in which they were carried out seemed to be the most worthwhile for the future development of distance training. However, the enquiry also dealt with firms carrying out training activities directly for their staff and bodies involved in vocational training, even if they had no direct experience of their own of distance training, to see how much attention they were

paying to it and check their programmes with a view to subsequent use of the system. In this way, the research completed did not merely show the most significant experiments and trials being carried out but also showed what the attitude of operators in the sector was concerning distance training.

The General Report drawn up is completed by a series of profiles drawn up for each body classified either as operating in the distance training sector or in any event interested in trying out training measures coming under that heading in the near future.